

Chapter 12

Factors Influencing User Satisfaction with Internet-Based E-Learning in Corporate South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This chapter looks at the factors that influence user satisfaction with Internet based learning in the South African corporate environment. An electronic survey was administered, and one hundred and twenty responses from corporations across South Africa were received. Only five of the thirteen factors were found to exert a statistically significant influence on learner satisfaction: instructor response towards the learners, instructor attitude toward Internet based learning, the flexibility of the course, perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use, and the social interaction experienced by the learner in assessments. Interestingly, four of those five were also identified as significant in a similar Taiwanese study, which provides an interesting cross-cultural validation for the findings, even though this sample was different and smaller. Perhaps surprisingly, none of 6 demographic variables exerted significant influence. Hopefully organisations and educational institutions can note and make use of the important factors in conceptualizing and designing their e-learning courses.

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INTRODUCTION

Background

E-learning can provide a learning experience delivered by the Internet and multimedia presentation (Lau, 2000). This article focuses on Electronic learning (e-learning), as it is delivered through the Internet, a phenomenon that is growing fast (Wang, Wang & Shee, 2007). ICT based training is core to the development planning of most African governments (Elearning Africa, 2006). South Africa is placing importance on e-learning in the public, private and governmental sectors. However, South Africa does experience certain limitations when it comes to accessing Internet based learning. Technological issues such as bandwidth and access, coupled with limited customisation of the learning management systems and content for a South African market, contribute to these limitations (Van Der Spuy & Wöcke, 2003).

With competitive markets and a strong focus on return on investment, the technology-based e-learning function in the corporate environment is evolving to be part of an organisation's focus when looking at improving service and possible cost advantages. The mid-1990's saw a new phase of technology-based e-learning resulting from the increased popularity in Internet and other web related technologies (Li, Lau, Shih & Li, 2008). Computers have become more powerful, leading to the Internet becoming a strong foundation for technology-based e-learning in an organisation (Hoffman, 2002). The learner and the organisation gain from factors such as standardised delivery of the learning as well as the ability and convenience for the learners to dictate the pace of their learning (Strother, 2002).

Corporate strategies and characteristics are constantly being changed by technology, including providing further adult education for employees (O'Sullivan, 2000). E-learning, and specifically Internet based learning, has become a business asset that can enhance the learning capability of

an organisation and can result in economic savings and increased efficiency for the organisation (Strother, 2002). South African companies not only design and accredit their learning material according to national, legal and industrial standards but also adopt international generic standards (Dagada & Jakovljevic, 2004).

Technology has altered organisational training and teaching so that these are no longer limited to the classroom and traditional teaching methods (Marold, Larsen & Moreno, 2000). An Internet based e-learning strategy within an organisation allows the employee to access learning content directly, irrespective of time or location (Brown, 2001). An e-learning system allows employees to schedule their own courses and examinations, as well as providing an environment where the learner can communicate and collaborate with other learners and/or the learning practitioners (Fry 2001; Stewart & Waight, 2005).

Assessing the success of corporate learning can be determined by measuring learner satisfaction experienced by the participants using Internet based e-learning within their respective organisations and is critical in the evaluation of an organisation's Internet based e-learning strategy (Wang, 2003).

Research Objective

The growth of the Internet and e-learning initiatives shows the need for an improved understanding of the factors that influence learner satisfaction of learners using Internet based learning in South African corporations. Consequently, the objective of this research is to document the factors that influence user acceptance of Internet based learning in the South African corporate environment. The research instrument is based largely on that used in a study conducted in Thailand (Sun, Tsai, Finger & Chen, 2008). The instrument has been modified to accommodate a South African corporate implementation, so that it is more relevant and understandable by an audience with different

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